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ABSTRACT

Heat problems and heat cramps related to jogging can be caused by fluid imbalances, medications, dietary insufficiency, vomiting or diarrhea, among other factors. If the condition keeps reoccurring, the advice of a physician should be sought. Some preventive measures that can be taken include: (1) running during the cooler hours of the day; (2) watching the humidity and temperature and adjusting workouts accordingly; (3) not wearing a fully closed hat or head gear; (4) not taking salt pills unless so directed by a physician; (5) taking water breaks; (6) wearing cotton clothing and allowing body surfaces to be exposed; (7) keeping track of weight loss; (8) being aware of concurrent medical problems; (9) taking time to acclimatize to environmental changes; and (10) maintaining a slowly progressive program. (DC)

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HEAT PROBLEMS

QUESTION: Last summer I began a jogging program; however, I found myself suffering from severe "heat cramps" in the back of my lower legs. How may I prevent this from reoccurring again this year?

ANSWER: "Heat Cramps" are primarily caused by a fluid in-balance in and around individual muscle cells. However, there may be other underlying factors that can be related to heat problems such as: medications you may be taking, a dietary insufficiency, vomiting or diarrhea, and a host of other medical conditions. Therefore, if these occurrences keep repeating themselves, I suggest you seek the advice of a physician to make sure there are no hidden conditions involved.

After your physician has given you medical clearance, you may employ the following suggestions in order to help you prevent this problem from reoccurring:

1) Schedule your running session during the cooler parts of the day (early morning or evening hours).
2) Closely observe the humidity and temperature index and adjust your workouts accordingly.
3) Do not wear a fully closed hat or protective head gear as a large amount of body heat is dissipated via the head.
4) DO NOT take salt pills unless directed to do so by your physician. Lightly add salt to your food and increase your potassium intake with high potassium level foods such as bananas, potatoes and/or tomatoes. This is sufficient to accommodate a normal athletes' electrolyte needs.
5) Allow for sufficient water breaks during your training time. I recommend a water break for every 20 minutes of activity. The most important element in heat illness prevention is fluid replacement.

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6) Wear proper clothing such as cotton fabric rather than nylon fabric. Allow much of your body surface area to be exposed so air may help carry away excess body heat.
7) Maintain a weight chart to keep track of your weight loss. If you have lost more than 5% body weight in one workout, do not workout again until you have regained that 5% body weight.
8) Be alert of concurrent medical problems. Some may have a direct effect on fluid loss (or retention) such as vomiting and diarrhea.
9) Allow your body time to acclimatize to a given environmental condition. As the summer approaches and the temperature climbs, adjust your pace and distance accordingly.
10) Remember - a slowly progressive program is the key to success. You can't train for a marathon overweight.

This information has been presented on a preventative basis. If you have any medical condition that could effect your body's temperature regulation system, please seek the advice of your physician.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding this article or any facet of sports medicine, write to the Institute for Medicine in Sports, P.O. Box 2621, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690 or phone (609) 586-4277. If you wish to make an appointment for physicians' clinic, sports rehab/physical therapy, cardio pulmonary rehab or a consultation regarding conditioning, nutrition and/or prevention call (609) 586-7900 ext. 6677.

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